

France to intensify military intervention in Central African Republic

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On his October 13 visit to Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR), French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius announced that France would be deploying additional troops in CAR by the end of this year.

The decision by French and US imperialism to support Seleka rebel forces and topple President François Bozizé in March has led to a disaster. There has been a surge in sectarian fighting between Christian and Muslims in this impoverished country, where France, the former colonial power, has dictated the installation of various corrupt regimes since granting CAR formal independence in 1960.

Seleka gunmen, many of them from neighboring Chad and Sudan, have repeatedly been accused of desecrating churches and terrorizing Christian communities.

As of October 9, “around 60 people have been killed in sectarian clashes in Central African Republic between local militias and former rebels,” local officials told Reuters.

Over 440,000 people have fled their homes. There are only seven surgeons in a country of 4.6 million people to deal with bullet and machete injuries.

Local self-defense militias, known as “anti-balaka” or anti-machetes, attacked a Seleka position in the mining village of Gaga, northwest of Bangui, on October 7, killing four ex-rebels before attacking Muslim civilians. Seleka fighters retaliated against Christian civilians in the village, witnesses said.

On October 18, the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) reported: “Renewed inter communal tension in the main towns of the country is especially worrying ... Tens of thousands of people are still hiding out in the bush. Their situation is worsening by the day. They’re living in terror, deprived of food, water and

medical care.”

Paris’s response was to deepen its military intervention in the country to support the transitional government dominated by Seleka. It spearheaded a UN Security Council resolution adopted on October 10, proposing to support a new multinational African Union force. A second resolution is being prepared to give this force and France a mandate for broader intervention.

Fabius said France will send additional troops and will take on a more active role in security operations in accordance with UN Security Council decisions. Countries bordering the CAR have deployed about 2,100 troops to the country, and Fabius said this would increase to 3,500.

He said this regional force “must have the capacity to act and France is going to help.” He said France currently has 410 soldiers in the CAR, and those troops are “charged primarily with protecting the airport and patrolling in Bangui.” He said with upcoming UN resolutions, “these different forces will be able to intervene more quickly and effectively.”

It is still unclear how many French troops will be deployed, but press sources said Paris is planning to increase troop presence by between 750 and 1,200.

France’s plan to deepen its support for Seleka—while presented under the usual pretenses of having purely “humanitarian” motivations—is aimed at recolonizing its former colony, one of the poorest countries in the world, and plundering its untapped natural resources. These include diamonds, gold, uranium, timber, and oil.

This is part of an explosion of French military interventions throughout Africa, aimed at securing French imperialism’s geo-strategic interests and containing China’s rising influence on the continent. In

less than three years, France has fought three wars in Africa, including in Libya, Ivory Coast, and the ongoing war in Mali.

In August, French President François Hollande called for UN intervention to resolve the CAR crisis, through which Paris seeks to play a dominant role. “It’s more than time to take action on the Central African Republic,” Hollande told an annual meeting of French ambassadors in Paris. “This country is on the verge of Somalisation,”

In December 2012, Seleka (“alliance” in the Sango national language) rebel forces moved against the forces of then-President François Bozizé, seizing towns across the country’s north and east. Seleka accused the government of reneging on 2007-2008 peace agreements mandating payments to rebel guerrillas and their integration into the national army.

However, the intervention by Chad and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) for the Consolidation of Peace in CAR forced them to stop and negotiate with the Bozizé government. The January 11, 2013, Libreville Agreement, imposed by ECCAS, temporarily prevented a coup and initiated a three-year power-sharing arrangement.

However, the deal only lasted for short time before Seleka rebel forces, with the tacit support of the imperialist powers, launched an offensive against Bozizé’s forces. Bozizé was toppled on March 24, and rebel leader Michel Djotodia declared himself president. (See “Seleka rebels seize capital of Central African Republic”)

Bozizé himself had taken power in a military coup in 2003, while then-president Ange-Félix Patassé was outside the country. He received support from Paris, including in the so-called Central African Republic Bush War (2004–2007) against the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR) in northeastern CAR led by Djotodia.

Subsequently, however, Paris turned against Bozizé as he tilted his policies towards China, making bilateral deals on business, trade and infrastructure development. It was under these conditions that Paris backed the Seleka coalition.

Seleka is made up of dissident armed factions from the northeast, which is predominantly Muslim, such as the UFDR and the Convention des patriotes pour la justice et la paix (Convention of Patriots for Peace and

Justice, CPJP). It has relied on intermittent support from other movements, such as the Union des forces républicaines (Union of Republican Forces, UFR) and the Alliance pour la refondation (A2R, Alliance for refoundation).

The decision of Paris to deploy additional forces underscores the fragility of the Seleka-led transitional government, which is weakened by rising internal political conflicts. According to UN reports, the state administration has largely collapsed outside the capital.

In June, the Belgium-based International Crisis Group wrote, “The disagreements within the Seleka are also coming out into the open. The movement seems unstable: some generals do not hide their deep dissatisfaction about decisions made by the political leadership... Contrary to previous crises, which only affected some regions, the current turmoil represents a change of political paradigms and affects almost the entire country. It manifests itself in the collapse of the state, making the country impossible to govern.”



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